

APPLICATIONS AND CRITICISMS USING NARRATIVE SPACE

IN VIDEO GAME DESIGN AND CONCEPTUALIZATION:

THE CONCEPT OF [SIB]

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MIA K. DIETRICH

DR. ROBERT BROOKEY – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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INTRODUCTION

[*Sib*] is a third-person, action-adventure, role-playing game for the PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC. The player's agency and movement throughout the game heavily immerse her in a magical, verdant, and tropical environment through the points of view (POVs) of three main characters; each of whom go on differing geographical journeys to rid the world of a viral plague. The game is targeted toward audiences who miss playing classic fantasy RPGs, as well as playing action games that can create addictive gameplay without the need for guns. These same players may also ask for something more western and modern in terms of narrative spatial structure, storytelling, and gameplay. Many of today's fantasy RPGs are on handheld devices, but there is a large, untapped market for colorful fantasy games to be brought back to consoles and PCs. These audiences want a fresh environment and story with an intense, magical atmosphere.

The battle system for [*Sib*] is real-time and action-based, similar to *Dark Souls*, and *Kingdom Hearts*. However, the three main characters have personalized interpretations of the leveling system and battle/environmental skills. Although the player must fight her way through many monsters and bosses, the game's mechanics focus more heavily on environmental navigation, modification, and strategy. The environmental navigation and puzzle solving are akin to *Golden Sun*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and *Shadow of the Colossus*. Storytelling and emotional character relationships are geared toward classic *Final Fantasy* fans who have matured to like more western and complicated storylines, which are heavily character-driven.

[*Sib*] offers several allies, enemies, environments, dialogue decisions, and endings. The player not only molds her story, but replays the game through other characters' POVs to suffer

(or enjoy) the consequences of her actions. These decisions, therefore, carry over into subsequent playthroughs. Each playthrough (of the three) is approximately 20 hours long, with dozens of hours of exploration and mini-games, as well as an exploratory post-game epilogue mode. The game also sets up for a pre-planned sequel and future franchising.

The story itself contains many thematic elements that are philosophically, politically, and religiously relevant to our current society; even though the game itself takes place in an agrarian environment. These themes include: creation and destruction; balance and imbalance; openness and isolation; as well as coalescence and entropy. The topics that employ these themes are not only narrative-based and controversial, but are also reflected in the game mechanics. Some of these include moral decisions involving genetic experimentation; use or rejection of magic and technology as tools; and the persuasive efforts of the Rashomon effect¹.

As the player runs through the game, she has the option to *create* new pathways or *destroy* the environment to reveal different routes. Most quests can be completed in multiple ways that reflect the spectrum of creation and destruction. Balancing, or not balancing, these forces will reward the player with gear and abilities that reflect her choices. Since these consequences and selections are never explicitly stated in the game, the player may be surprised that her agency affected the gameplay significantly. Once she has played through the game, the player will realize where her tendencies lie, and will not only learn something about herself, but may also decide to play the game again, perhaps differently.

The goal of this project is to conceptually bring to life all concepts of the story, characters, geography, cultures, mythology, and gameplay. This is done through academic

¹ Viewing the same story different ways through different character POVs.

research, video game analysis, as well as some artwork and script writing. The research itself includes a wide range of literature concerning narrative space; player agency; character and world building; as well as inspiration from other video games, cultures, world history, and religions. This literature provides a lens through which [Sib] is created and explored. Using theories of spatial narratives, this paper will analyze the first Dark Souls game for its mechanical and story structures. [Sib]'s key elements will use the literature review and game analysis to marry the creative efforts of environment, story, and game mechanics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Final Fantasy is a critically acclaimed yet complicated franchise, and as such it is difficult to talk about holistically. It has wavered in popularity across western gaming culture. A scholar could write a small book on why, but for the sake of brevity: many of Squaresoft's veterans flew the coop for political and financial reasons, and the games changed. While Japanese culture still holds the series to be quite popular, the now SquareEnix has started to alienate their western audience. The games continue to be fairly linear, in a world that cannot be explored laterally. The settings are trending to urban and sci-fi, rather than earthy and magical. The series exploits its own tropes through gimmicks rather than innovations. News regarding their most recent installment, *Final Fantasy XV* (which is still in development), has shown that SquareEnix has addressed some of these issues. The world is much less linear and is more easily comparable to that of a Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG).

Analyzing the differences between what can be called "classic" *Final Fantasy* and the newer *Final Fantasy* games could be the springboard to targeting the audience for [Sib]. The differences also become easier to identify being part of that exact demographic myself. And of course, I am conceptualizing the perfect game for my own tastes. But there is a lot of research

that has gone into that. It may start with *Final Fantasy*, but there is much more inspiration through other games, academic literature, and design intuition.

The most influential, inspiring, and immersive part of gaming for many players is their movement throughout the virtual space. This makes the environments themselves key to connecting navigation to the narrative of the story. This is “narrative space”--a spatial form of narrative theory that unfortunately has a limited amount of literature relating to video games. Stephen Heath defines narrative space as it relates to cinema in 1976. Equating the photographic image to film, as language is related to a novel, he states that this is representative of the control of movement and perspective of the reader/viewer. In other words, narrative space is how the reader interprets events within the given landscapes. With content analysis, and plenty of examples (i.e. Hitchcock and Oshima Nagisa films), Heath argues that the creation of movement and pattern within the film creates a space for the action to take place. His main conclusion is that events not only take “place,” but also provide an environment for someone to observe and move within. It is the passive spectator who follows and moves throughout the narrative space provided by the film itself.

Mark Cooper has stated that Heath’s work is incomplete, however. In Cooper’s article, *Narrative Spaces* (2002), he critically analyzes Heath’s paper. While Heath talks mostly of spectatorship in film and the rules of Renaissance perspective, Cooper uses textual criticism and aggregates several theories of narrative perspectives, including Carroll, Bodwell, Silverman, Crary, Lefebvre, and so on. In doing so, Cooper is trying to argue that Heath’s perspective on narrative space is incomplete, because Heath solely talks about camera placement relative to the characters, and avoids answering how these “character looks” establish and organize *alternative* cinematic space. Cooper seeks to answer this through content analysis of how true love is

represented in film, not through diegetic space and a single-character perspective, but through a collectively shared space that the lovers inhabit. He concludes that the space and journey that kept the lovers apart until their final reunion is *just as important* in the visual narrative represented by the spectator's point of view when seeing the lovers together. In other words, narrative space includes, not only the space the audience consumes, but the implied space the characters are living through "off screen."

Sheila Jones (2011) speaks on how space and setting are impossible to separate from narrative. Kemp (2012) talks about how readers then convert that narrative to time. Even physicists lump time and space together. Narrative space is how the audience experiences the marriage of time and space to create a story.

One can apply this knowledge toward the medium of video games in ways that have not been fully discussed. The theory of narrative space can be applied to video games due to the way humans perceive time, space, and narrative. Within *Indexing Space and Time in Film Understanding* (2001), Magliano, Miller, and Zwaan perform an *a priori* analysis of provided films to study how viewers monitor shifts of time and space within the films. The authors brought together a theoretical analysis of the films, as well as qualitative input from participants. What they find and conclude is that a viewer's understanding of events in film is no different than their temporal understanding of events within simple text, allowing for the deduction that event understanding takes place independently of the medium provided, or the method of experience. This means that readers interpret narrative space in the same way, whether they are reading a novel, watching a film, or even playing a video game.

Once virtual space in video games is brought up, however, there is more literature to consider on immersion through narrative space. James Ash argues in his article, *Emerging*

Spatialities of the Screen: Video Games and the Reconfiguration of Spatial Awareness (2009), the different spatialities of screens using established research on the technology. While space can be studied by what projected images represent, Ash takes an alternative approach by studying the function of the images themselves. Using video games as the main example (*Call of Duty 4*, specifically), the article identifies the relationship between the screen, the player, and the immersion that follows. It is argued that video games are a great illustration for his argument, because examples like paintings, maps, film, etc. offer a representation of reality. Video games, however, offer their very own form of reality. Ash talks about how the screen presents an extension of our spatial universe without having to actually move within the real world. This produces a different mode of sensing our environment by reconfiguring the relationship between seeing and touching. He concludes by noting that screened images reform the body's senses to allow new realities, which skew spatial awareness.

The player is further immersed if she identifies with the fictionalized characters. In fact, the greater the fictionalization, the greater the immersion (Caracciolo, 2011). Caracciolo specifically aims to emphasize a player or reader's projection of themselves into a virtual body, and the function that projection has within narrative space. Using quantitative case studies, he argues that there are varying degrees of fictionalization of this virtual body, each of which has its own role in the manipulation of narrative space. He concludes that the more fictionalized the reader becomes, and the more connected she is with the virtual body, the less cognitive effort is needed for the reader to absorb herself into the setting and story (or narrative space), facilitating the reader's construction of mental images. These mental images, Caracciolo argues, are not the final role of the virtual body, but in fact a means to an end. Simply put, they are used to

understand and interpret a given fictional text, allowing the reader to construct more meaning and significance.

Virtual bodies are not the only way to immerse a player or a reader. Tolkien's work has immersed many fans before movies and video games of his worlds were even created. Much like Caracciolo describes, in-depth fictionalization creates immersion, and Tolkien provides plenty of that through the environment of Middle Earth alone. In the article *Tolkien's Imaginary Nature: An Analysis of the Structure of Middle Earth* (2005), Michael Brisbois breaks down the natural world of Tolkien's environments. He emphasizes the importance of landscape and ecology within Middle Earth, while also discussing how these are related to culture. Within the books, Samwise Gamgee (a fictional character) states while talking about the Elves, "they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say." This is to imply that much like how time, space, and narrative are always connected, nature and culture can be difficult to isolate from one another. Brisbois goes on to separate fictionalized nature into two categories: passive and active. He then breaks these categories down even further, concluding that the use of these groupings will help scholars and creatives "perceive a greater meaning in fantasy literature, beyond a mere melodrama of good versus evil."

Most of the literature so far can be applied to film as well as games. There is something further involved with games that not only immerses the player more deeply, but gives them a sense of action and agency. The most obvious difference between film and video games is that the viewer can perform actions and move throughout the space with autonomy. Bernadette Flynn makes a beautiful analogy of navigation of space as a language (Flynn, 2003). Drawing from Harvey's spatial models and from examples such as *Myst*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Balder's Gate*,

Flynn claims that narrative is not even necessary to explore a world. While each story is a travel-story through space, Flynn explains, not every space needs to have a story. In the video game examples provided, narrative may be an important piece, but the movement throughout the represented space acts as the organization for the experience that takes place. Players may drop their usual motives that take them through the game, and replace them with a curiosity to explore the attractions and terrain before them. She concludes that the language of navigation acts through the player's agency, allowing different kinds of consciousness and perception of the game space. This is something that cannot be experienced in movies.

There's even *more* literature concerning how space is used as structure and organization for video game stories (Jenkins, 2004; Huber, 2009; Mosca, 2009). Huber specifically addresses the issues with linearity in Japanese games, and the disparity it has caused for their Western audiences. He argues that fans do not take into account that its geography is used as a vehicle for the story, or that this linearity is based off of moving from space to space. And while it is true, it does leave one skeptical. There are more ways to move through a space than linearly. Why is laterally, or even backwards, not a possibility? What about above, below, around?

There will always be more questions, and they represent the next steps: How do we replicate the feeling of quick and cognitive movement in a video game? What is the most we can do with genres and technology today? How can we get the most fun and creativity out of the navigation of virtual space?

The first few places to start to answer these questions are in games that are the most compelling with their atmosphere and fluidity. *Skyrim* is an excellent example of open-world, although it could be argued that it does not use that space very well. A player can go nearly anywhere at nearly any time, which makes the game itself feel too amorphous. As stated, spatial

and temporal organization are very important when it comes to narrative immersion. *Skyrim* showed the industry that players can have what feels like a limitless world, but the players' actions did not affect that space. Once the main plot points were completed, the geography did not reflect any change whatsoever. There are also so many more ways to utilize *movement* throughout space and how the space tells a temporal story.

Games like *Assassin's Creed* and *Uncharted* show promise in terms of fluid, dynamic, and varied movement. Hundreds of animations were made for these games concerning navigation alone. And while many are reactionary and ill-timed, they provide an excellent foundation for future virtual navigation in fictional worlds (as human avatars).

Puzzles are also a favored way of moving throughout a space. Audiences like to feel smart. The differences between the 2D environmental puzzles in *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and the 3D puzzles of *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* are well articulated in one of Arin Hanson's "Sequilitis" videos (Hanson, 2014). He not only talks about goals and expectations between the player and the explored space, but also the differences between dimensions and how those can be exploited.

The *Golden Sun* series, although 2D, is a very simple example of excellent environmental puzzle solving. While in *LoZ*, you have to acquire tools to move through your environment, *Golden Sun* allows the use of battle abilities to modify your environment for navigational purposes. Combine this with the complete modification abilities of a game like *Minecraft*, and the compartmentalized "open-world" structure of *Borderlands*, and one can imagine the beginnings of the immersive experience that is *[Sib]*.

Concluding this literature review, the main take away is that throughout all mediums, a reader explores a space while creating the significance of a story within her head. Movies create that narrative for us. Video games allow both the developers and the players to mold the story. A player's agency and movement throughout a space becomes the most important lens through which one must analyze and create meaningful spatial content—especially in near-limitless virtual worlds.

As this next section points out, and as Flynn states, exploring a space does not always create a narrative. Sometimes the use of movement throughout a space exemplifies the game's mechanics instead. Discussing the differences between these two uses of virtual space has different effects on the player's experience. I will explore these through an analysis of *Dark Souls*.

NARRATIVE VS. MECHANICAL SPACE: A STUDY OF DARK SOULS

Video game consumers are offered an endless stream of games to play. Twenty years ago, gamers could focus on one or two games at a time, putting dozens of hours (sometimes even hundreds) into a single cartridge or disk. These time-consuming pieces were either expansive in their worlds and stories, or simply difficult to beat. Today's market is saturated with every kind of game from every kind of genre that a gamer barely has time to spend a few dozen hours on a single one. Not if she wants to keep up with the industry.

This saturation has lent itself to a trend: easy, methodological games. Easier games mean quicker gameplay. Proven methodologies give consumers cookie-cutter titles, like the pervasive first-person shooters. Easy games are more addicting, because they do not frustrate their players.

This trend happened to start alongside the advent of popularized gaming consoles, like the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Keech, 2013).

It is an interesting development. Arcade games were always ahead of the curve of console gaming until 3D engines became ubiquitous amongst households (Feit, 2012). An arcade game is specifically designed to lure players into feeding it more coins, so it is intended to have maximum difficulty. But once the market moved into the consumer's home, the focus shifted. In order to make money in the home console market, games tried to keep the audience's attention with story and world building, while keeping the difficulty relatively light (Keech, 2013). Games such as *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) were revolutionary at that time for this reason. It brought character, story, and world depth that had never been seen before in a 3D virtual world.

Much like how Hollywood spits out franchise after franchise, with the same story structures, video games began to do nearly the same. Franchises, game engines, and movie-like story skeletons became not only the norm, but expected. Producers trust what has been developed and bought before. The *Final Fantasy* series has well over 50 games, *Mario* has more than 170, and even a "newer" franchise like *Assassin's Creed* competes with eight full games (with expansions), and nearly 20 spin-off titles.

It is not a surprise that long-time gamers have become bored and disappointed with today's market. Looking on several forums from Gamespot, IGN, Reddit, to GameFAQs shows

millions of gamers in agreement—gaming is too easy and predictable. Games do not provide as strong feelings of euphoria that come with the accomplishments of beating a boss or puzzle.

↑ [-] [Scorpinock](#)

↓ There's too much hand holding in today's games. You start up Super Mario Brothers now. Where is the tutorial level? Where are the save points? How do I know that I can't jump into the gaps between chunks of ground? You just play the friggin' thing. Players can and will figure things out. Focus testing has killed the difficulty in modern games.

There are exceptions, and *[Sib]* aims to take notice and inspiration from these exceptions. Through a heavy analysis of *Dark Souls* and its spaces, many parallels between *[Sib]* and *Dark Souls* will be seen. More specifically, this section will focus on *Dark Soul*'s use of virtual space, in both mechanical and narrative senses.

The *Dark Souls* series is lauded for its difficulty and freshness. But the games are so much more than that. They are smart. They make the player feel smart. An accomplishment is always earned, never given. Its mechanics are nuanced and strategic. The story is hidden. The environments are interesting and unpredictable. To begin “narrative space” has already been defined, but I would like to coin and define the term “mechanical space”.

Mechanical Space

Before 2004, there was a rather large debate amongst gaming academics. Narrative and game mechanics were often separated into different studies, and many scholars thought they should never be married together in academic discourse (Jenkins, 2004). Since then, scholars like Henry Jenkins have tried to bridge the gap. One excellent way to do so is through the theory of narrative space. According to Jenkins, the architecture, or level design, of a video game can be integral to both its story and the game's mechanics. In *Roller Coaster Tycoon* (1999), for example, the player must build an amusement park. How the player lays out paths and vendors

for the patrons, as well as building the roller coasters themselves, will determine the narrative of the park they create. In this way, the space marries the mechanics with the story.

However, not all space is used to further a narrative. Mechanics and story are simply not connected at all times throughout every video game. When critically analyzing a game, it is important to recognize when to join the two. For this reason, the term mechanical space could be used to differentiate when the virtual space is purely ludological, rather than connected to a narrative.

To critically analyze *Dark Souls*, this distinction is imperative. While the spaces do tell hidden stories, most level design choices are purely for mechanical difficulty. For this reason, I think it is important to use the term mechanical space, and discuss the mechanics of *Dark Souls* first.

Game Mechanics and Spaces

As a third-person, action role-playing game (RPG), *Dark Souls* is heavily combat based. Unlike many hack-and-slash games, there are more than just buttons for attacking. In *Dark Souls*, you may block, parry, counter, roll, backstab, kick, jump, cast spells, target enemies, shoot projectiles, as well as attack in three different ways: weak, strong, and jump attacks. This is only the surface of combat, however. There are different move sets for the hundreds of weapons that are in the game. Character stats are customized by the player to gear toward their own play styles. The weight of the character affects the speed of movement. Because of this variety, there are many play styles.

Other games may contain a variety of move sets, such as the infamous MMORPG, World of Warcraft (WoW). But the actions and combos created by the player in such games are easy to

memorize and spam continuously. Because of this, there is usually a “best way” to play a particular class of character. *Dark Souls* avoids this by having a more reactive feel to its combat system.

In *Dark Souls*, each enemy has a different move set that the player must learn to counter and maneuver around in order to progress. Different play styles call for different tactics for every enemy. Even enemies that have the same base model may have different behaviors.

In most games, enemies get harder by simply having more health and stronger attacks. If the player levels her character high enough before a battle, she can nearly guarantee that she will win by spamming the attack button. In *Dark Souls*, however, a high-leveled character does not guarantee a positive outcome. The player still has to study her foes and think on her feet. If performing well, she could beat harder enemies even with a low-leveled character.

Because of this reactionary and strategic battle system, *Dark Souls* forces the player to “feel” its controls. They become visceral. The avatar becomes an extension of the player’s body, making her forget about her real self as she focuses on the performance of her digital limbs. James Ash refers to this phenomenon as a skewing of spatial awareness (Ash, 2009). Others, like Caracciolo, view it as a virtual embodiment (Caracciolo, 2011). This brings us to the importance of mechanical space and how the combat system interacts with it.

Many games (such as the *Final Fantasy*, *Chrono*, and *Golden Sun* series) separate environmental exploration and fighting enemies into detached mechanics. When exploring throughout those RPGs, navigation is halted entirely to engage fiends in battle. *Dark Souls*, however, combines the enemies and the environment as a larger puzzle, requiring the player to

navigate and fight at the same time. Not only does the player need to study the move sets of her enemies, but she must also study how they interact with the environment.

This can be used to the player's advantage. *Dark Souls* is known for killing the player mercilessly with unexpected traps and enemies, but once the area has been studied, she may use her surroundings as tools. For example, a pressure plate may send poison darts at the player character. Once she is killed by this trap, she knows to not only watch out for it, but to lure enemies into triggering the trap themselves.

Because the game makes full use of its three-dimensional space, the player may also kick enemies off of edges, or dive onto foes from above with powerful ambushes. The enemies are vulnerable to the same mechanical space as the player, and they can use it against her in the very same ways she may use it against them.

NPCs and Spaces

The player and her enemies are not the only ones subjected to *Dark Soul's* mechanical space. There are also non-playable characters (NPCs). In most games, NPCs are invulnerable to the player's attacks. They are usually too valuable or decorative to respond to being threatened with violence, so they are programmed to ignore it. In *Dark Souls*, however, the player must be careful about where she swings her sword. All NPCs retaliate and will attack until either they or the player dies. This game shows no mercy for the decisions made. Even important characters, like vendors, are capable of being killed.

There is one way around this. If a player attacks an NPC, she may pay for absolution with the game's currency: souls. But in order to do this, she must trek through her environment

toward the single man in the entire game who offers her absolution. The NPCs do not necessarily congregate in one easily-accessed area, although many do.

There is a “home base” that houses many NPCs, at least once you rescue them. This space is like a central hub. From here, the player can reach out and explore in any direction. The only obstacles that may get in a player’s way are tough enemies, locked doors, and inaccessible short cuts. There are no invisible walls. There are no loading screens between areas. The world is one cohesive whole to be explored in a nonlinear fashion. The beauty of this is that the player is never given any sort of map or navigation system. She must truly have a sense of the space around her in order to progress.

There are more ways in which the player, enemies, and NPCs interact with the space that are more narrative-based. These narrative spaces have the ability to not only tell stories, but influence the player’s agency and progress.

Narrative Spaces and the Social World

The story of *Dark Souls* begins with one of the very few expositional cut scenes in the entire game. It explains the origin of the world, but not the current story in which the game takes place. All the player is told is that there are many horrific creatures in the world of the undead—including the player. She starts off in a place called the “Undead Asylum” which, as a

mechanical space, is used as a tutorial. As a narrative space, it introduces the world as unforgiving and mysterious.

Due to that mysterious nature, the game removes the player's sense of entitlement. The player is owed nothing, unless she earns her keep. But even then, there is no guaranteed prize of exposition or gear. In fact, there is rarely any exposition that is stated on the nose, or stated at all.

In most games, the story is delineated via cutscenes and characters. *Dark Souls* merely provides teasers to hidden stories that are never guaranteed to be resolved. For instance, nearly every space is in complete ruins, implying a much more bountiful past. Stone walls have been torn down, bridges collapsed, jail cells torn open, doors barred, tombs emptied, and stairs completely wrecked. This provides not only environmental obstacles, but context clues for escaped prisoners, violent giants, and the sprawling undead.

Many games offer stories via their narrative spaces. The *Elder Scrolls* series is most notable for environmental storytelling. A bloody table with torture tools needs no verbal explanation. But wherever the environment fails to deliver a story, NPCs usually make it up with unsolicited advice and tall tales. In many RPGs, these NPCs intimately offer information to the player as if it was their job. Walk up to a villager in *Lost Odyssey* (2007), and not only will they tell you what they're thinking at that moment, and what they are doing with their lives, but they might even trigger a memory in your player character that takes up another ten minutes of explanation.

Some people enjoy this form of storytelling in video games, but *Dark Souls* has a different approach that reflects its merciless game mechanics and environments: the NPCs will

rarely tell the player anything. This makes the player not only hunger for more story, but also invites her to guess at the hidden significance.

There is one NPC that ultimately acts as a little guide. He will tell the player how hopeless her case is, and that she has to ring two bells. That's it. Two bells. She may go up to the church, or down to Blighttown, but she does not get to know how or why. Other NPCs may give small hints to game mechanics, like how to upgrade weapons, but their own story is usually veiled in riddles, insane laughter, and vague after-thoughts.

For example, if the player manages to find the correct key, as well as the jail cell it goes to, she can free a man who claims to be Lautrec of Carim. That is the only piece of information he gives of himself, his name. When you free him he says, "I am free. Now I can get back to work. Keh heh heh heh..."

The creepy and often maniacal laughs are common for the NPCs. Their dialogue leaves the player with small hints of their own agency, without fully stating their purpose or background. Not only do they show a much deeper hint of character in their dialogue, but their locations can tell stories, too.

Using the same NPC as an example, Lautrec is first found in a jail cell where the player can free him. Why was he put in there? Who put him in there? These questions are not guaranteed answers. Next, you see him near the central hub, or "home base" of the game where you can engage in him further. Even after the player has freed him, he says, "Our futures are murky. Let's not be too friendly, now." Perhaps you should not have helped him escape? When returning to the area over again, he may be gone, or he may be there. His absence, as Cooper

states in his talk of narrative spaces, implies that Lautrec has his own autonomy and agency elsewhere (Cooper, 2002).

Later on, Lautrec hints at “taking care” of a mute whose only job is to keep a bonfire lit. When the player returns to the area later, Lautrec is gone, but the Fire Keeper’s lifeless body is left behind to pillage. Only one thing can be assumed. The player could have prevented this by killing Lautrec, but the game would never expressly say it. The player has to figure this out through the veiled dialogue.

It is unwise to trust anyone in *Dark Souls*. Most games condition players to trust unassuming NPCs, and this game exploits that trust. One NPC abuses that power, while also making a literal use of space, by luring the player to an edge and pushing her off the cliff to her death. He later apologizes, while laughing insanely. The player has no obligation to avoid revenge, and may therefore mold a new story from their own actions and kill the NPC.

The beauty of this limited style of storytelling not only invites the player to ask questions, but gives her a true experience of what it would be like to actually be her character in this universe. She must figure everything out for herself, rather than being told where to go, what to do, and who everyone is. This sort of immersion is important, but it is also enhanced by the player’s sense of space, which is only made greater by the third-person perspective.

Player Psychology of Third-Person Perspective vs. First-Person Perspective

Both first- and third-person perspectives have their advantages, depending on the game being played. Isbister talks about the difference between the two when it comes to the

psychology of the player in Chapter 8 of her book, *Better Game Characters by Design: A Psychological Approach* (2006).

In this chapter, Isbister talks about the four layers of game character psychology as they relate to the player's psychology. These four layers are visceral feedback, cognitive immersion, social affordances, and fantasy affordances. A brief breakdown of these layers can help pinpoint the effectiveness of using either first- or third-person perspectives in a video game.

Visceral feedback is the player considering the experience through the player character's (PC's) senses. Players can adapt to these. What sorts of powers does the character have, if any? How does it feel to control and move them throughout the world? How does the player connect this experience to the narrative? Some great examples of this, according to Isbister, are how sports games give the player a heightened sense of athleticism. Platformers allow the player to jump farther. Even text-based adventures could provide enhanced social abilities for the player.

Dark Souls has powerful visceral feedback through its battle system and perspective. The player feels a hit through the vibration of the controller and sees the PC stumble, yell, and bleed. The player also feels the power of her character, because the PC starts off very weak. She only grows stronger by mastering the battle system, which has its own emotional rewards. This helps the player to feel like she is truly the one who is powerful, not just her PC's stats.

Cognitive immersion is the second layer. This is when the player processes information in a deliberate way, making decisions based on this. This makes the player inhabit the consequences of those decisions, such as when/who/how to attack. When designed well, this should feel natural and intuitive. Bad cognitive immersion design is when the player feels she

must make a decision in the game, like jumping at a certain point, but is unable to do so (Isbister, 2006).

Dark Souls does well in this regard, in that the player is at complete fault for every decision she makes. Her consequences of killing an NPC are earned. Her plan to invade another player's world in multiplayer can backfire. If she decides to block, instead of dodge, the attack may kill her character. Every decision is important, with the possibility of dire and permanent consequences.

Social affordances are the third layer. This is the social landscape of a game that gives context between the player, the PC, and the NPCs. This is interpreted through social cues from facial expressions to language. The PC is the bridge between the player and the game's social world.

This is where Isbister specifically discusses the differences between first- and third-person. She states that third-person is especially effective for social immersion, as the player wears the avatar as a social mask. Using the example of *Half-Life* (1998), Isbister discusses how alienating first-person can be. *Half-Life* uses this effectively with a silent protagonist. The first-person perspective hides the facial expressions and reactions of the PC. NPCs, therefore, must respond to a brick wall. This creates a block between the player and the game's social world, which is effective and purposeful in an isolating game like *Half-Life*.

Third-person allows the player to fully reach out to the social world. A well-designed PC requires strong social affordances. These could be a well-defined personality and social role/context; customizable appearance such as clothes and gear; and social cues and choices in

multiplayer, or when interacting with NPCs. The PC must therefore reflect the player's emotions/questions/roles back at her.

Dark Souls, being third-person, allows for the possibility to connect to the social world in these ways. However, with limited dialogue with the NPCs (and no dialogue from the PC), there is hardly a social world to speak of. This is not the case in multiplayer, however. When encountering players from other "worlds" or games, the player may pick a gesture from a repertoire of signals she has collected throughout the game. Using these gestures, she may shrug, jump for joy, wave, and perform many other actions that relay emotion to other players' PCs. This is the only form of communication between players, which would be highly difficult to witness in first-person.

The final layer is fantasy affordances. Isbister states that games can provide a platform to help adults and children alike "come to terms with concerns, explore emotionally laden or thorny problems, or to create a foundation for making an important identity shift" (2006). Games let the player explore these options and solutions for problems. A well designed PC speaks to many players on a personal level.

Dark Souls provides fantasy affordances by challenging the player. The NPCs often say that the player's efforts are futile, and the player will be guaranteed to die several times in several frustrating ways (which is true). The fantasy of the player is merely one of, "Oh yes I can." Completing the trials in the game gives the player the resolve to say, "If this were me, I

would have actually made it this far.” The combat system, and therefore visceral feedback, really ties into this feeling of having earned such resolve and fulfilling that fantasy.

Dark Souls is well-grounded in these psychological layers, at least in ways that are appropriate for the game’s merciless atmosphere. Its third-person perspective truly allows the player to feel a part of the world. However, this perspective is even more important for spatial reasons.

The visceral feedback of the battle system would not be possible in first-person. First-person requires the player to look in front of the PC at all times. This gives a tunnel vision effect that limits environmental understanding. It also limits a properly skewed sense of space. Third-person allows the player to have a full sense of where the PC’s body and limbs are at all times. This is extremely important in the strategic battle system, because the player must always be aware of how they are placed within the environment in order to succeed.

If *Dark Souls* were played in first-person, the player would feel spatially confused. Unable to sense her footing, the player would not know where or when to dodge and attack. The game is already difficult as it is, but mastering the skills it takes to beat the game would be impossible without a sense of space. The player would have no way of acquiring this sense in first-person. This fact, however, is what makes first-person horror games so much more terrifying. However, in a game like *Dark Souls*, spatial awareness is key.

Conclusion of the Analysis

Dark Souls is ahead of the gaming curve when it comes to spatial mechanics and difficulty. It answers the call from gamers who demand more challenging games. The

consequential battle system puts every bit of control into the players' hands. Rarely any mistake is the fault of the game itself.

Its spaces are labyrinths of traps, enemy intelligence, and both internal and external struggle. They give glimpses of stories that are never fully explained. They are mysterious and merciless. *Dark Souls* fully utilizes the potential of three-dimensional environments and the possibility of exploring a world nonlinearly. The rewards are better gear, geographic shortcuts, or emotional satisfaction and pride.

It is reminiscent of the older arcade games that are so difficult, they must be memorized through death after death. All of the enemies respawn, making them permanent pieces to their environmental puzzles.

The importance of this game's success is indicative of the possibilities within the gaming industry. When players have such a high emotional level of accomplishment attached to a game, they will commit dozens of hours to its franchise. Because of *Dark Soul's* minimalistic storytelling, the game is an excellent skeleton and blueprint for future games with deeper stories. The sense of mystery invites the players to beg for more information. They will work hard and play hard for these rewards. This is an exploitable tactic that is enjoyable for the players, and rewarding for the developers.

Ultimately, *Dark Souls* excels as a modern game by applying classic arcade difficulties within a beautifully rendered three-dimensional world. Its storytelling allows for greater narrative expansion using similar spatial mechanics. Identifying the differences in how *Dark Souls* uses mechanical space versus narrative space allows a developer to map passive stories through environment (such as characters disappearing) and active stories through her games'

mechanics (such as pushing an NPC off a cliff). With all theoretical and analytical angles covered for the foundation of [Sib], this paper can now shift its focus to the creative flesh of the project: [Sib]'s story and mechanics. We will see the player cause fires through their own recklessness in battle, which changes the trajectory of the story. The player will also passively see deep history in the folds of a colossal city. How one chooses to interact with player character's statistical development (health, defense, and other stats), will affect their ability to interact with the environment. A player's choice with certain NPC's will affect those NPC's choices concerning environment as well. Before we delve into the narrative and mechanical spaces of [Sib], we will first dig into the game's narrative history and current story.

[SIB]'S GAME STORY

The Beginning

The history of the planet of [Eldorquelm] begins with the creation of its solar system. Each solar system in this universe has its own set of gods and principles. The sun is the leader, or "Benefactor." It is He who creates the gods below Him to sustain life in the system. He sleeps for many epochs at a time, only waking for important events. While He slumbers, the lesser gods carry out His will. The Will of the Benefactor varies from system to system, and the Benefactors and their gods are by no means infallible or immortal.

In this game's solar system, the Benefactor has principles of *balance* and *isolation*. Wishing to sustain His realm for as long as possible, the Benefactor believes in a symmetry of creation and destruction, all while avoiding contact with other systems. Because of this, interstellar travel is expressly forbidden. To maintain this balance, He created three gods to defy

the laws of physics: a Creator, a Destroyer, and an Arbiter. All of whose powers are spatially limited to the solar system itself.

While the Benefactor slept, His gods created and maintained a world with life. The Creator makes matter from nothing, while the Destroyer does the opposite. However, nothing can be accomplished without proper judgment from the Arbiter. It is She who ultimately decides how these forces are used, and it is She who maintains this balance.

The world they created is a dwarf planet with three small “satellites,” (or moons) each an observatory for its respective god. Since the planetoid is so small, it is more of an ellipsoid than a sphere. The axis about which it turns, combined with its orbital spin around the sun, leaves a perpetual darkness at the south pole, and perpetual lightness at the north.

Ancient History

After many eras, life on the planet became technologically advanced. While the gods were certainly proud of their creations, they realized where this path was leading. They believed that before long the humans would develop interstellar travel. Together, and according to the Benefactor’s Will, the gods planned a preemptive solution.

Technology was created by the people to solve problems. In order to force the humans to stop innovating and using this technology, the gods needed to come up with a controllable replacement. They decided to utterly destroy the technology and all of its factories, while leaving a gift in their place. Once their plan was finalized, the Destroyer ripped the earth asunder beneath the industrial district of the world’s sole metropolis (remember, the planet is very small). To fill this void, the district collapsed into the newly made chasm. Thousands died, but what are a few

thousand to the likes of the gods? To them, the sacrifice was necessary to protect the system and the Will of the Benefactor.

To replace the technology, the gods gave themselves to all forms of life through the diffusion of a magical essence. They believed that technology would constantly arise if the people were not given alternate tools, so they insisted that magic could be their newest instrument. Since the gods' powers are already limited to their own solar system, they knew the people could not use this magic to leave it. This was a rather large sacrifice, however, since the transfer *locked the gods into this very essence*.

This apocalypse caused many of the religious to hate the gods. Some forsook them altogether, claiming they no longer existed. However, some devout priests (especially magistrates of the King) could not give up their religion so easily. That would also mean giving up political power. Instead, they spread word that the gods punished its people for using technology.

In part, both the godless and the devout were right. Technology *was* the reason for their misery, and the gods were no longer able to respond to prayer and faith. Evidence of their existence could only be found in the magic of the world, and the people now controlled this magic.

Due to this rift in religious ideologies, the Kingdom's politics eventually became secular. But the Church was still heavily involved in the cultural and moral palette of society. Before, many people worshipped all three gods equally. But since the Ancient Apocalypse, many believe the Destroyer, and thus the Arbiter, were not worthy of such devotion. Therefore, the only deity the people were allowed to revere was the Creator. Thus the religious people of the Kingdom

became monotheistic. However, some outsider cults for the other two gods do exist in the world today--their governments, religions, and magicks a mystery to civilians inside the Kingdom.

Modern World

Many centuries go by as the people of [Eldorquelm] adjust to and hone their magical abilities. All people have an ability to express themselves with their minds, and it is this magic that can be used to alter the matter and space-time around them. Some apprentices of the magical arts become so strong that they can alter the very DNA of another person. Others are so weak, that they can only express themselves during moments of extreme emotional instability. These expressions are usually violent and unpredictable.

The sole Kingdom would be horribly uncivilized if the masses could not gain control of their emotions and powers to some degree. In response to this need, the Kingdom developed a school for the children, in which they are educated about how to hone and control their magical expressionism. But the Kingdom was also getting to hone their *own* control over every generation by providing a biased history, as well as a certain ethical conduct for life. The children grow up with this propaganda in the schools, but the slums (and anyone in the mysterious outskirts of the Kingdom) do not have access to this type of education.

But there are not many children in the slums, and it is common knowledge that their numbers are dwindling. Several mutants populate the blighted area and are barren. Many have simply died or gone insane. Most babies do not live through childbirth, and the ones that do still have to deal with the harsh environment that is the ancient, and some say haunted, chasm below.

[Genetic Massacre]

These mutants and their home in the slums did not occur slowly and naturally. Forty years prior to the events of this game, the [Genetic Massacre] took place. Genetic diseases were becoming a greater issue; deadly viruses had begun to evolve. The King-appointed “genetisticians” of the time (magicians who are focused on manipulating genetics) were assigned to experiment on sickly prisoners and the mentally ill to create a cure. However, these experiments got out of hand, and the resulting mutants were banished to outside the Kingdom. Most could not go far, so they settled in the ancient chasm to the west and below the city.

From this point forward, genetic engineering was forbidden on all sentient beings. Genetisticians, then, were no longer a part of the Kingdom either. Many were ridiculed and exiled, while others sought forgiveness and employment in the Church of the Creator.

Current Story

It is at this point, forty years after the [Genetic Massacre], that the game takes place. The genetic virus that has been subdued or cured, thanks to previous experiments, has evolved. The current disease feeds off its host’s DNA, mutating instantly, and making it an entirely different virus from person to person. It lingers and grows like a cancer, until the host is no longer himself, but a chimera of arbitrarily mutated parts.

As the virus has spread, the people have begun to disappear. Much like forty years ago, the first people to go are the mentally ill and the elderly. The prisons are suspiciously empty as well. The Kingdom has done an excellent job of keeping the people civil and unaware, however the mutant village knows precisely who to blame for the missing people. But are they right? Has the government learned its lesson from forty years ago?

The player begins as Sibelle, a 24-year-old slum girl. Adventurous and passionate, but also quick to be emotionally extreme, Sibelle is the perfect starting point to explore the world of [Eldorquelm]. She begins the story as a seemingly-typical trope of a petty thief, trying to find anything valuable enough to earn her an audience with the King. Her father is one of the afflicted, and she aims to bribe or extort the King into helping them. However, her father is kidnapped, presumably for experimentation, so she is forced to embark on a journey to save him from his captors as well as his disease. Immediately blaming the King and his people, Sibelle often finds herself in dangerously precarious situations, hasty to judge and blame anyone related to the government.

Meanwhile, the son of the King's Guard, Kaid, carries his own burdens. He is 32, practical, aloof, and alienated. He is slow to trust, which even includes distrusting the use of magic. Because he is emotionally isolated, he spends most of his time alone, training his body and mind. Soon into the game the King is assassinated. Kaid takes it upon himself to avenge the King, in place of his mother (the King's Guard), while also looking for a way to destroy the virus that has afflicted the youngest princess. Blaming Gaspar (below) for the King's death, he spends much of the game on his trail. He is instrumental as the second playthrough avatar, as much more is revealed about the plot that Sibelle's point of view could not have possibly realized. However, Kaid does not know the entire truth either.

Gaspar is the final playthrough avatar. He is a 64-year-old priest of the Church, healthy and stalwart. He took part in the [Genetic Massacre] forty years ago as a genetistician's apprentice, and has carried that guilt throughout all these years. The only person he allows himself to love is his sister, but she too has succumbed to the virus. Without his sister, he would have no forgiveness in this world; so he takes it upon himself to quietly and swiftly engineer a

cure. This is a slippery slope for him, and he relentlessly finds himself putting out metaphorical fires. Past the point of no return, he indirectly antagonizes the other two characters while simultaneously pressuring himself to not give up on curing the only light in his life. Since his situation is always spiraling out of control, he (and thus the player) has more of a linear story that is based on the player's decisions as Sibelle and Kaid. From his point of view, all questions are answered, and all motivations explained.

It is the player's goal as Sibelle, Kaid, and Gaspar, to save their loved ones from genetic abomination. The player must either destroy this virus entirely or create a permanent cure. In order to do this, these characters must take their motivations outside the Kingdom to pursue their goals. Many mysterious environments, trials, enemies, allies, and choices await them on their journeys apart.

LUDOLOGICAL STORY STRUCTURE

Playthroughs

[Sib] provides a story structure that reflects the Rashomon effect. When the player goes through the game as Sibelle, she sees the outcome of the entire story, but only from Sibelle's point of view. Playthroughs as Kaid and Gaspar reveal much more about the politics, religions, and history of [Eldorquelm].

Each playthrough can be very different, however. Dialogue and action decisions are reflected in subsequent playthroughs. If the player chooses to egg on Kaid as Sibelle in a particular scene, the player will see Sibelle make that same choice when the player is acting as Kaid in her second playthrough. It is then up to the player to decide how to react to her previous decisions as Sibelle, perhaps going a different route entirely. When playing as Gaspar, the player

then sees her choices as both Sibelle and Kaid manifested, limiting the player's choice as to how the story unfolds (although there are still significant decisions to be made).

Timeline

The player not only decides certain dialogues and actions, but also geographical journeys. *When* the player decides to traverse a particular location, that time will be reflected in subsequent playthroughs. For example, the player (as Sibelle) enters the quest-line for the town of Veii in week #4. When she plays as Kaid in her second playthrough, Kaid will be able to find Sibelle in Veii during that same time. All NPCs have their own timelines and agencies as well, which are influenced by the player's actions.

An astrological event will occur on the final day, much like in *Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*. In [Sib], however, the player has a much longer time until that final day. While this time will depend on how large the game eventually becomes, the current draft speculates about three months of in-game time. On the final day, a large comet is predicted to pass by the planet on its south end. The gravitational pull of this event has been slowly tearing the planet apart every few decades. This becomes the final level and landscape for the game, with weakened gravity, and shredded earth.

The religions throughout [Eldorquelm] speculate the significance and powers of this event. The comet does seem to amplify magical properties at its apex. It is the goal of the player to end up at this location by the end of the game with all three avatars.

GAME MECHANICS

[*Sib*] offers not only a compelling story, but addictive gameplay as well. The game centers itself around three branches of mechanics: environmental navigation, battling, and social interaction. While all three are important individually, the choices a player makes within each branch affect the outcomes of the others.

Environment

The semi-open-world environment offers the most immersive element to the game. Any space you can see, you can eventually get to with the right navigational tools and/or abilities. Exploration is important, but also rewarding. A player gets the satisfaction of filling out a map while finding treasures, hidden villages, and characters. Even extra knowledge of ancient times and mythos can be found throughout the world, although it's not necessary to complete the story. But the player has to be careful. She does not know what enemies await in far-off places.

Navigation throughout the environment is limited at first, for each playable character. While they can walk, run, jump, and grab onto things, their abilities are limited to that of a typical human. As they level up and help those in need, they will gain more environmental abilities. Some of these may be tools, such as a canoe or a hang glider. Others may be magical abilities that allow the player to double-jump or fly for a short period of time. Some abilities may be destructive, mowing down paths. Others may be creative in that the player may rapidly grow a plant into a bridge. This balance of creation and destruction is a common theme throughout the game in many aspects.

These environmental abilities are always enabled throughout the game and can be used strategically in battle, but also in helping (or hurting) NPCs the player meets. Many in-game objectives will be based around the player's ability to navigate and modify the environment. These modifications are permanent, so the player must be careful about the choices she makes and how they affect the world around her.

Battle System

The battle system itself is live and always enabled. At any point, the player can attack or jump. This way, enemies may ambush at a moment's notice without the environment or space having to change. The player must be careful, as she can also hurt friendly NPCs.

Each playable character will have a basic attack that costs no resources to use. A special attack or spell will also be assigned to a button. The skill assigned to this button will be chosen by the player from a repertoire of abilities obtained throughout the game. If the player wants to use a consumable item, or use an ability that is not assigned to a button, he may open up a menu to choose from any options not readily available. This removes the need for a cluttered interface. The only stats that will be displayed are the character's current HP (hit points), AP (ability points), and/or MP (magic points), and only while they are in use. From the configuration menu, the player may also toggle optional displays, such as the enemies' HP, names, and weaknesses. Other displays, such as NPC names and subtitles, are also optional.

Social Interaction

Where *[Sib]* will really shine and differentiate itself is in its social interactions and how they affect further playthroughs. Since the protagonist changes based on which story mode the player is in, the dialogue choices become increasingly complex and player-based. For instance,

in the first play through as Sibelle, the player will encounter Kaid and Gaspar throughout the story. During these scenes, and sometimes battles, the actions and speech decisions the player makes affect not only the PC's relationships with other characters, but the actions those characters will take. What makes this unique is that the player will suffer (or enjoy) the consequences of these decisions when they play through the story again as the other two playable characters.

For example, Sibelle has many dialogue options with Kaid throughout the game. The player can choose to pursue romance, friendship, or hostility toward him. Afterward, when playing the game as Kaid, Sibelle as an NPC will reflect the exact choices the player made as her in the initial play through. The player then has a chance to react to her as Kaid himself. The same goes for their relationships with Gaspar.

As each character, the player will also have the choice between allies that can temporarily join their party at certain locations. These allies come with environmental abilities that work synergistically with the player character, unlocking geographical locations and guiding the narrative. The allies the player chooses as Sibelle will not be available as allies when the player is acting as Kaid and Gaspar. This creates an even greater motivation to replay the game, because the player may want different allies to team up with different PCs.

Leveling

Defeating enemies, completing quests, and discovering new areas award experience points. New skills and abilities are learned from equipped weapons, armor, and accessories. These pieces of equipment gain their own experience points that allow the player to learn its

abilities permanently, much like the ability system in *Final Fantasy IX*. Some abilities might be a haste spell, ranged attacks, healing abilities, area-of-effect attacks, or status effects.

The player character has an overall level that upgrades the player's stats, such as HP, strength, speed, defense, and so on. There is not a level cap, but the experience needed to level up after level 99 is extremely difficult to attain. Stat points are given to the player at each new level, and the player may distribute them as she sees fit.

Stats

[Sib] shares many of the same stats that are found in classic RPG's like *Dark Souls* and *Final Fantasy*. These stats include:

- Hit Points (HP)
- Ability Points (AP)
- Magic Points (MP)
- Strength
- Magic
- Physical Defense
- Magical Defense
- Vitality
- Speed
- Evasion
- Stamina

These stats have many of the same functions within battle as the player might be used to in the previously mentioned games. However, these stats can also affect how well the player handles the environment.

For instance, a character with high stamina is able to hang onto a branch for an extremely long time. They may also withstand drastic temperatures for much longer. A character with high speed is able to run and execute commands quickly. High evasion allows the character to automatically avoid falling rocks or diving birds. High physical defense and vitality allows the player to withstand falling from great heights, or being smashed by rocks they could not avoid.

Weapons/Armor/Accessories

Equip-able items are geared toward each player character. Parts for upgrading can be found in treasure chests, purchased through merchants, but mostly gained from completing quests.

The PCs weapons are upgraded by their allies in the beginning area. Sibelle has Lucci to give her hybrid magical technology. Kaid has a personal blacksmith, Uma, who specializes in the ancient arts of welding inert metals. Gaspar's assistant, Melchior, helps with carving and enchanting staves. Each character also has the ability to turn their environment into a weapon. For instance, Sibelle may use a piece of a bamboo-like plant for blow darts. Kaid may break off a branch to use as a bo-staff. Gaspar could genetically alter the environment to do his bidding.

Accessories are not upgradable, but they are replaceable. Cheap accessories can break easily, while rare ones may be indestructible. They are often enchanted, upgrading specific stats or buffing abilities. Sibelle has an item hanging from her shirt across the stomach. This item is usually taken off of a defeated enemy's body, such as a feather or fang. Kaid is outfitted with inert armor, so his accessories are much more classic in nature, like belts and rings. Gaspar has many staves, but each has room for a magical orb or crystal. These are his replaceable accessories, and they are usually heavily enchanted.

Enemy and Ally A.I.

Enemies in [Sib] are more evolved than typical monsters, often literally. Some creatures are very social and have pack-like mentalities. Others may be isolated loners. Some can be friendly, while others hostile. Some groups of monsters are smart and create puzzles for the player. Others may barrage the player with their large numbers. Most enemies have certain strengths and weaknesses. Some are naturally occurring, while others are leftover mutants from the decades-old massacre. Some have even evolved since then. Most use the environment to their advantage, like the monsters who live in perpetual darkness or daylight, or the ones who live in the swamps or water.

Allies are not controlled by the player directly. The player can, however, program her allies to react accordingly. This can be done within the main menu. For instance, the player will decide whether an ally takes the role of a healer, tank (defender), or otherwise. The player can be rather specific with programs such as “If Sibelle is inflicted with [status effect] use [item].” This is influenced by the gambit system in *Final Fantasy XII*.

Inventory

Sometimes inventories can be a huge hassle. To remedy this, as unrealistic as it may be, the in-game inventory is nearly bottomless. The player can have any number of unique items. The only limit is 99 of a single item. This is to discourage hoarding up to a point, and allow the characters to spend their items if they find themselves with abundance.

Menus/Interfaces

The goal of [*Sib*] is to immerse the player in the environment. This means interfaces and menus must only show up when necessary. As explained before, HP meters and the like only appear when they are being affected. A mini-map is optional.

Menus, however, are still necessary. The player must be able to equip items, program allies, toggle displays, configure controls, and much more. All of this is available when hitting the start button. However, even additional abilities must be accessible in the middle of battle. This brings to light a second menu--the battle menu. When fighting, the player may open the battle menu in order to use an item or ability that has not been hot-keyed to a button. The player may decide if accessing the menu pauses the game or if the game remains active. A player would choose for the world to remain active while they are in their battle menu to increase difficulty.

CONCLUSION

The main foci of [*Sib*] involve story and movement throughout a virtual space. The movement must feel fluid, intuitive, visceral, and above all, fun. Using that movement as a language to tell the story of [*Sib*] is the ultimate goal. That is why the study of narrative and mechanical spaces are so imperative to this game's foundation.

As shown, character stats affect the player's interaction with the environment. This can have detrimental effects to the story, by creating or destroying paths. The environment itself tells a story, like the massive chasm. Within itself lies the history of the gods, and the gift of themselves to the people. The goal of movement throughout [*Sib*] is to reflect the story and personality of each character—Sibelle fluid and impulsive; Kaid quick and precise, and Gaspar slow, but bounding.

[Sib] will make use of mechanical space by offering seamless tutorials at the beginning, through use of a flowing river, or falling glider. These are also directly related to the narrative, as well as Sibelle's movement through these spaces (i.e. crash landing, through impulse, despite being knowledgeable of the path through practiced motions). Much of these examples can be seen in the script in the following appendix.

[*Sib*] is admittedly an ambitious project. This thesis only outlines the very beginnings of something that will hopefully become much larger. As with any creative project, there is always room for more work to be done. However, I believe this thesis presents a solid foundation to what could become a successful video game, and quite possibly a franchise.

APPENDIX A (SCRIPT)

“[SIB]”

Written by:

Mia Dietrich

OPENING ACT

CUTSCENE

EXT. [JERICHO] - COMMERCIAL DISTRICT - MIDDAY

SIBELLE runs from the Royal Guard with an unknown POTION in her left hand. Her athletic build and thin limbs allow for effortless agility through the bustling streets and narrow alleyways. She carries a wooden GLIDER on her back and a small SACHEL draped over her hip. The MUSIC is fast-paced, introducing the leitmotif of Sibelle's character.

ON HER HEELS, KAID, the Commander of the Royal Guard, leads two of his ARMED MEN in heated pursuit through the verdant city. He is not slowed by his tailored armor, but is instead propelled by his unwavering loyalty--as if he needs to prove himself.

They twist their way through colorful architecture and winding streets. The buildings are designed and maintained by trained artisans who specialize in magically-engineering large plants. Every building is organic and unique.

KAID

Sibelle!

Sibelle smirks; eyes focused on the flowering steeple in the distance.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player's Objective: Reach the church/learn to run, jump, and control the camera.

Conflict/Obstacle: Kaid and the armed men pursue the player.

SPACE: Commercial and Municipal districts of [Jericho].

Failure Trigger: Kaid and/or the armed men catch the player.

Success Trigger: Player reaches the church.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player is prompted to try again.

CUTSCENE

EXT. [JERICHO] - CHURCH STEPS - MIDDAY

Sibelle, still smiling, uses her free hand to pull on the church's door. It is locked. Sibelle only has a split second to comprehend her confusion and turn around before Kaid traps her against the entry. She yells out, glancing behind her at the church.

SIBELLE

Gaspar!

Kaid points his spear at Sibelle's throat, guiding her down to the gnarled wooden ground, back against the door. A crowd has gathered around the church.

KAID

Looks like he's not here to save you this time.

PLAYER CHOICE

1. Antagonize Kaid.

SIBELLE

Stabbing me should solve all your problems, Commander.

2. Beg for mercy.

SIBELLE

Kaid, I need this. Don't waste your time on me.

CUTSCENE(S)

1. Kaid gives Sibelle a scornful grimace. They lock eyes as the air stirs around Sibelle. Her hands brace the wooden steps. Kaid lunges in for an attack with his spear, scraping Sibelle's side as she rolls out of the way. She winces and grabs the laceration, gaping at her attacker with surprise.

2. Kaid gives Sibelle a doubtful look and lowers his guard. She raises her hands beside her head to not only show surrender, but to also present the stolen POTION. The bottle is intricate in design and seems to give off an unnatural glow.

After either option, their conflict is interrupted by horrified PALACE GUARDS.

TIMID GUARD

S-sir! There has been a terrible tragedy in the palace!

Kaid freezes. He pales, staring at the PALACE GUARDS. Kaid's ARMED MEN look to each other for answers, and Kaid snaps his face toward Sibelle--a determined look of accusation.

KAID

A distraction?

Sibelle stares straight ahead, paralyzed.

YOUNG GUARD

Sir!

The PALACE GUARDS run back toward the royal district. Kaid re-grips his spear, lingering his focus on Sibelle for a little longer. He gives a quick nod to his ARMED MEN, and they dash toward the palace.

Sibelle slowly stands. She stares after Kaid with either...

1. Contempt, holding her wounded side

2. Worry

...depending on the player's choice.

A scatter of onlookers glower and spit at Sibelle. Some look at her with pity. One FEISTY SPECTATOR throws pebbles at Sibelle, ushering her to leave. A cluster whispers to each other, gossiping about what just happened.

Sibelle shields herself, scowling at the crowd, and tears off, hugging the walls of the church, clutching the POTION close, and spilling into:

EXT. CHURCH'S GARDEN - TIME OF DAY

It is darker back here. A canopy, thick with green leaves and vines, scatters shadows over lush moss clinging to a WORN, WOODEN PATH. Flowers pepper the moss-laden fence enclosing this luscious garden.

Sibelle pauses, listening. Nothing.

Safe, she kneels over a strew of BURNT YELLOW FLOWERS, focusing on one in particular. Mutated, like the others, she seems to find something unique about this one. She caresses it, hand forming to pluck - but she stands abruptly.

Ahead, the fence. She places the POTION gently in her satchel, and swiftly one-hands herself to the other side.

EXT. [JERICHO] - PRESIPICE - JUST BEFORE SUNSET

Sibelle lands, a practiced hold over her satchel. She raises with an eager grin.

She breaks into a stride, the beaten ground kicks up dirt; her gait quickens, faster and faster she goes. Grass gives way to root, and she explodes all the faster as:

ESTABLISHING: She's on a MASSIVE BRANCH, sixty feet wide, stretching from a colossal STALK supporting [JERICHO] itself. Countless weaving

branches, roots, and folds intertwine this mammoth fixture, all teeming with life. Vine pods act as lifts between districts while near infinite amber lights flicker within inhabitants' windows. In its seeming chaos, one could question if there was order to its creation.

The BRANCH twists WESTWARD into the sun. Sibelle's smile whitewashes as she bounds over a knot and lands with merely inches of purchase. She's at the edge, the BRANCH snapped and worn.

She steps closer, toes gripping bark, a huffing exhale as she twist a clasp around her neck, bracing for: she jumps!

Sibelle plummets, smile ever wider, brow furrowing in concentration as she DEPLOYS HER GLIDER.

FLUMP! Air catches the WINGS and she's momentarily weightless before releasing a thrilled LAUGH.

She sails high above the RIVER toward the ancient CHASM. [Jericho] is further revealed as a singular colossal plant, over one thousand feet high, maybe more. Its centuries-long history is apparent in its growth and folds. Sweeping MUSIC transitions to the MAIN THEME of the game.

TITLE [SIB] OVER: EPIC WIDE of Sibelle's miniscule silhouette in background. A falling dot.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Land safely by the river/learn to glide.

Conflict/Obstacle: Wind, large plants.

SPACE: The sky above the river.

Failure Trigger: Landing outside the designated area.

Success Trigger: Player lands within the designated area.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: The player is prompted to try again.

CUTSCENE

EXT. RIVERSIDE - JUST BEFORE SUNSET

Sibelle makes a rough landing by the river, but manages to land on her feet. The POTION tumbles out of her bag and lands in the water, floating down stream. Her eyes widen.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Chase the POTION/learn to grab, swing, and fight.

Conflict/Obstacle: Enemies/Environment/Time.

SPACE: Riverside.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.
Success Trigger: Player chases the POTION to the waterfall.
Upon Success: Cutscene.
Upon Failure: The player is prompted to try again.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - CHASM CLIFF/WATERFALL - SUNSET

Sibelle's fingers are inches from the POTION as it slips out of range and topples over the edge. Sibelle shrieks, gaping over the waterfall; the POTION plummeting into the mist. Tortured failure washes over her face.

She stands, slowly, gazing over the cliffs of the ANCIENT CHASM. She stares at the setting sun to the WEST, stiff. After a pause, Sibelle leaves her thoughts and scans the bottom of the CHASM.

The shaded earth is torn apart for miles north to south. It seems to have no end in either direction. The horizon bends liberally, showcasing the small size of this planet. The base of the CHASM is littered with ancient RUINS, whispers of a prehistoric, technological age. Most of the RUINS are covered in tropical flora and mutated fauna. The river extends itself southward down the CHASM, splitting it unevenly.

Sibelle focuses on the VILLAGE beneath her feet near the waterfall basin. The river has eroded this part of the chasm down to a 250-foot drop. The rest of the CHASM towers anywhere up to 400 feet. She glances at the base of the waterfall where the POTION had fallen.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Glide toward the basin.
Conflict/Obstacle: Wind, large plants.
SPACE: Cliff drop.
Failure Trigger: None.
Success Trigger: Player glides far enough.
Upon Success: Cutscene.
Upon Failure: This is a doomed to fail action, so there is no player failure.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - NORTH OF MUTANT VILLAGE - SUNSET

An updraft causes Sibelle to lose control. The rough landing breaks the glider in two, and rolls Sibelle into some nearby brush.

SIBELLE

Damn it!

Sibelle sits up, wincing. She holds her head in her hands and begins to rock back and forth, her face scrunched up in anger. Yelling out, she savagely slams her fists onto the ground between her legs.

The air around her is swirling. She stares at the circling dust for a beat as time slows down around her. A gust of wind picks up the smaller piece of her broken glider, and Sibelle snatches it out from in front of her.

SIBELLE
...keep trying.

Gingerly, Sibelle uses the glider's unraveled twine to crudely tie it back together. Tears well up in her trembling eyes, catching an unnatural flicker of light northward toward the waterfall basin--the POTION? Her eyes focus. Still as night.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Go to the waterfall basin.

Conflict/Obstacle: Environment/Enemies.

SPACE: North of the village.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Player arrives at the waterfall.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: The player is prompted to try again.

CUTSCENE

EXT. WATERFALL - TWILIGHT

Sibelle approaches the basin as faint SNIFFLES echo behind the waterfall.

INT. WATERFALL CAVE - TWILIGHT

Inside the waterfall is an ETHERSCRIBE.

NOTE: ETHERSCRIBES come in many forms, but are typically identified by their surrounding rocks and magical fields. The rocks hold a similar crystalline glow to the POTION, although less concentrated. As a narrative space, ETHERSCRIBES display thoughts, emotions, possible futures, and other speculative expressions of the person(s) inside. As a mechanical space, ETHERSCRIBES can display hints, hidden treasures, mythos, and can be resting points for Sibelle to heal her drained stats.

Sibelle sees GIBLY hunched over within the ETHERSCRIBE. A chubby kid, no more than 13 years old, Gibly looks nearly spherical while bent

over on the ground. Hundreds of images and events dance above his head within the magical field. Gibly sobs as Sibelle approaches.

SIBELLE

Gibly...?

Gibly shoots up in surprise, not standing much taller than he was while sitting. He puffs up higher for a second, but stumbles. He gulps and holds his words back, struggling. Sibelle looks concerned.

SIBELLE

Gib, what are you doing in here?

The cave rumbles softly. The images twist, morph, and distort into chaos. Gibly mumbles through his sobs. Sibelle steps closer and slowly reaches for him.

SIBELLE

Let me take you back to
the village.

Gibly speaks a little louder, the cave amplifying his small voice.

GIBLY

There's nothing we can do, Sib.

Sibelle kneels down and puts her hands on his shoulders.

SIBELLE

Hey. Hey. Look at me.

Gibly shyly gazes up at Sibelle's face, his big eyes red and welling.

SIBELLE

Etherscribes like this are
dangerous. They put funny
thoughts in your head, Gib.

Gibly shakes his head no. Sibelle reaffirms.

SIBELLE

Yes. Hey.

(beat)

None of it's real, okay?

The rumbling weakens, but Gibly is still shaking his head. He is able to look at her and speak more confidently.

GIBLY

Sib...

(sniffle)

Yosef told me about your mom.

Sibelle's concern quickly fades into a blank stare of disbelief.

PLAYER CHOICE

1. Dodge Gibly's statement.

Sibelle stammers a bit, trying to save face.

SIBELLE

Heh-Yosef. He's just like Gaspar,
ya know. They both love tall tales.

2. Acknowledge Gibly's statement.

Sibelle looks to the ground, then re-grips Gibly's shoulders and glares at him firmly.

SIBELLE

It was her choice. It wasn't fate.

CUTSCENE

NOTE: Both scenes end up with the same response from Gibly, but the player's decision will have an affect over future interactions with him.

Gibly's eyes fall to the ground. A beat. He shuffles toward the exit.

GIBLY

I dunno...
Maybe I'd stop believing, too.
(pauses, looking behind)
But some things are just known, Sib.
Those things can't be changed.

He hurriedly waddles out of the cave as Sibelle stands, struggling to craft a response.

She is fixed stiffly for a long beat, her eyes glazed and absent. A gurgling bellow interrupts her, and fear strikes her face. She looks around her at the ETHERSCRIBE as it begins to concoct ghastly images in front her eyes.

Suddenly--a gruesome portrait. A colossal, mutated monstrosity. Utter destruction. Sibelle shuts her eyes and turns away, the air around her twirling and howling. Screams are heard from every direction, including Sibelle's. Shrieking, she flees out of the ETHERSCRIBE blindly, falling into:

EXT. - WATERFALL BASIN - NIGHT

Sibelle is motionless under the water, allowing the change in gravity to soothe her. Flashes of memories dance in her mind. Her mother. Her father. The POTION.

She opens her eyes and is greeted by hundreds of bioluminescent lights bobbing in the waves. Looking around her, she spots a familiar glimmer. She immediately dives deeper, searching for the unnatural light. As she approaches, she is surprised to see the POTION intact.

Sibelle brings the POTION up to the surface of the water, gasping, and stares at its brilliance. There is not a scratch to be found on the bottle. A grin splits across Sibelle's face as she realizes her efforts were fruitful after all. She LAUGHS, hope welling in her eyes.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Go to the mutant village.

Conflict/Obstacle: Enemies/environment.

SPACE: North of the village.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Player arrives just outside the village.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player is revived at the last autosave.

As she gets closer to the village, faint screeching surges into a deafening roar. Sibelle turns to confront the sound, facing a swarm of MUTATED MONSTERS.

STORY BATTLE

Player Objective: Defeat monsters/Learn tool combat.

Enemy: Bat-owl Hybrids.

SPACE: North of the mutant village.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Monsters HP=0.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player is prompted to try again.

NOTE: The environment reacts to the fight. Weak trees snap, wind picks up dirt, leaves, pebbles, and short-rooted plants. The environmental changes are permanent.

NOTE: In this fight, the player must use the broken GLIDER as a weapon, creating whirlwinds that crowd control the flying monsters into targetable masses.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - NORTH OF THE VILLAGE - NIGHT

Still standing, Sibelle leans on her knees while trying to catch her breath.

YOSEF (O.S.)
Sibelle? Is that you?

Sibelle clenches her body: eyes wide, nostrils flaring, and teeth shut tight.

SIBELLE
Shit.

A tall shadow emerges from the trees. It is YOSEF. He is an old and thin mutant, carrying an air of bitter wisdom. Although he means well for the ones he loves, he rarely loves. He looks around at the battlefield and sighs.

YOSEF
You are one of the few I can
identify solely by the
havoc you cause.

Sibelle clutches her broken GLIDER closer. Her eyes go from panic to anger as she looks up at Yosef.

Yosef glances toward the POTION peeking out of Sibelle's SATCHEL. His eyes widen. Sibelle turns to hide the POTION. They lock eyes for a long beat.

YOSEF
Coming from the Etherscribe, I see.
You've finally learnt your lesson.

SIBELLE
You told Gibly about her.

YOSEF
There's a moral to that story,
you know. Someone should learn it.
(glances to POTION)
It certainly isn't you.

Sibelle throws her glider to the ground, confrontationally. A puff of disturbed air grows ever troubled between them.

YOSEF
Careful. Think of your father.

PLAYER CHOICE

1. Don't hold back.

The small whirlwind around Sibelle's feet lifts the damaged foliage from the previous battle.

SIBELLE

Just because you think he relies
on you does not give you the
right to boss me around!

2. Calm down.

Sibelle forces herself to calm down. The air stills as she smirks and gives Yosef a front of confidence.

SIBELLE

He'll be fine. And I'll be
the one to save him, not you.
Not the gods.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - NORTH OF THE VILLAGE - NIGHT

1. With a sharp wave of his hand, Yosef stills the air.

YOSEF

My only goal is to protect
your father. You would do well
to heed my advice.

Sibelle scoffs, picks up her GLIDER, and heads toward the village.

2. Sibelle picks up her GLIDER and heads toward the village. Yosef calls after her.

YOSEF (O.S.)

Only a child believes that she
alone has agency, Sibelle.

SIBELLE

(over shoulder)
And only a fool believes the
gods have any at all!

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Go to the bonfire.

Conflict/Obstacle: Enemies/environment.

SPACE: North of the village/village itself.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Player arrives at the bonfire.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player is revived at the last autosave.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - SLUM VILLAGE - NIGHT

Sibelle arrives in her home village. The architecture is a mixture of trash from the city above as well as amateur magical arts. MUTANT VILLAGERS gather around a large bonfire in the center.

NOTE: The player may talk to the NPCs to learn more about the village and its people.

A few children are gathered around the campfire with a HEFTY FIGURE. Once the player approaches the group, a cutscene takes place.

EXT. - SLUM VILLAGE BONFIRE - NIGHT

GASPAR, a stalwart man, no less than 60 years of age is leaning on one knee. He has gentle eyes that hold deeply hidden regrets. However, Gaspar regales stories and teachings to the children with the fervor of a fresh teacher.

PLAYER CHOICE

The player may interrupt this scene at any moment, or wait for it to be carried out. Once CHILD #4 speaks, Sibelle will automatically interrupt if the player has done nothing.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - SLUM VILLAGE BONFIRE - NIGHT

GASPAR

...And so He ripped the
ground asunder! The entire
metropolis fell into the chasm,
and the planet shook so
violently that the every bird
on [Eldorquelm] retreated into
the sky.

The children look on, wide-eyed.

CHILD #1

B-but wouldn't that kill
all those people?

CHILD #2

Yeah! How could He do
something like that?

Gaspar smiles, happy to see his lessons taking hold.

GASPAR
Because that's what He is.
The [Destroyer].

CHILD #3
That's why I like the
[Creator] so much.

CHILD #4
Yeah, He's so cool! I
wanna build my own world, too.

The kids talk excitedly with themselves. One child mimics an explosion with his hands, while another pretends to be a tree growing from the ground to the moons. If the player has done nothing, Sibelle interrupts the cacophony here.

PLAYER INTERRUPTION

SIBELLE (O.S.)
Gaspar!

CUTSCENE

EXT. - SLUM VILLAGE BONFIRE - NIGHT

Silence. The kids look to Gaspar. He steadily stands up, locking his gaze on Sibelle's face. His brow furrows in subtle sorrow. Sibelle snarls at him. Slowly, Gaspar's grimace slips into a sad smile.

GASPAR
Did I miss something?

Sibelle, unable to stay mad, grins and runs up to Gaspar. She gives him a playful punch to the chest. The kids continue their spirited banter.

Gaspar notices a slight gleam coming from Sibelle's hip. The POTION. He freezes.

SIBELLE
I don't think I've ever seen
the church locked before.
You took away my best hideout.

Gaspar stares at Sibelle, planning.

PLAYER CHOICE

1. Playfully guilt Gaspar.

SIBELLE

Come to think of it, I haven't
seen Melchior in a while.
He on vacation, too?

2. Acknowledge Gaspar's stagnation.

SIBELLE

Something's happened. Is it
to do with the palace?

CUTSCENE

EXT. - SLUM VILLAGE BONFIRE - NIGHT

1. Gaspar winces slightly. Sibelle cocks her head.

GASPAR

This is no vacation, Sib.
You should stay away from the
city, too. Go see your father.

2. Gaspar stares knowingly.

GASPAR

Stay away from there, Sib.
Go see your father.

After either option, Gaspar glances at the POTION and turns to leave.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Go to Sibelle's home.

Conflict/Obstacle: Environment/enemies.

SPACE: Mutant village and surrounding area.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Enter home.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player restarts after conversation with Gaspar
(Autosave).

CUTSCENE

INT. SIBELLE'S HOME - NIGHT

Sibelle's home is cancerous and amorphous in shape. Lanterns reveal the bloated, wooden walls--rot. Feeding off the house's death are colorful fungi and omnivorous plants. Sibelle enters one of the many

holes into the house, as rodents scuttle past her feet. She stops to inhale deeply. Her smile contradicts her surroundings. Home is home.

She walks gingerly into:

INT. PHILON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

PHILON is wheezing off screen. Sibelle approaches slowly, becoming more childlike in demeanor.

SIBELLE

Dad...

PHILON is lying in bed, afflicted. A curved spinal column has grown over his right eye. Most of his skin is infected with a repulsive mixture of scales and fur. He has two left ears and two left arms. The rest of his chimeric body is hidden beneath the blanket. His only visible eye bleeds awareness.

Somehow, he smiles.

PHILON

My 'Belle.

Sibelle drops next to her father, exhaling the day's anxieties. At home, we see a new side to Sibelle. Her face relaxes. She is gentle.

She tenderly grabs one of his hands and places the POTION within it.

SIBELLE

Please, Dad. Drink this.

Philon stiffly stares at the potion. His eye searches Sibelle's face.

SIBELLE (CONT'D)

(quickly opens the POTION)

I know I shouldn't have, Dad.

But everyone's in a panic, you know?

We have to look out for our-

Philon coughs forcefully and drops the POTION, its contents spilling onto the rotting wood.

SIBELLE

No!

Sibelle looks desperately at the liquid soaking into the ground as Philon's cough becomes a full blown fit. Tears well in her eyes, yet the bottle still shimmers in the lantern's light. She stares at her father, hurt. Did he spill it on purpose?

Philon's eye locks onto hers. His coughing stops.

PHILON

'Belle. I need you here tomorrow.

Sibelle nods her head quickly and silently, pursing her lips, still in shock. Philon drapes his hand over Sibelle's.

PHILON

You have to learn to face reality.

SIBELLE

(through her whimpering)
There has to be a cure!

Philon's eye smiles.

PHILON

That is for the gods to decide.

Sibelle leans back, trying to hide the snarl curling onto her face.

SIBELLE

Weren't you just speaking of
reality? The gods do not exist,
and even if they did...!

Sibelle picks up the empty bottle, stands up, and gazes at the
POTION'S impossible brilliance. She snarls fully.

SIBELLE (CONT'D)

I'll inspire true justice in
their absence.

She looks to him defiantly. Philon stares back, his eye now praying.

Suddenly, their stillness is broken by screams coming from the heart
of the village.

Sibelle frantically blows out the lanterns in the room. Shaking, she
puts another blanket over her father, putting the empty POTION under
there with him. Philon grabs her arm in the dark, coughing
uncontrollably. She tries to stifle him, but he speaks erratically.

PHILON

'Belle, leave me behind. You must
protect our village. Promise me
you will guard it even when
I am gone.

Sibelle stares at him, shaking her head. Philon grips her arm with his
other left hand.

PHILON (CONT'D)
Our village, Sibelle. Promise me!

His eye pleads.

PLAYER CHOICE

1. Promise.

SIBELLE
I will. I will! I promise, Dad.

2. Do not promise.

SIBELLE
No, Dad. I promised to protect you.

CUTSCENE

1. Philon breathes a sigh of relief and releases her arm.

PHILON
Thank you. That eases my heart.

Sibelle reluctantly leaves Philon behind, focusing on his fatherly eye.

2. Philon stares at Sibelle. His grip weakens.

PHILON
You sound like your mother.

Sibelle grimaces, angry.

PHILON (CONT'D)
Go. The villagers need you.

Sibelle rips her arm from his grasp with a stifled scowl. She gives him one final, heartbroken, and determined look before leaving him behind.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Investigate the village.

Conflict/Obstacle: Environment/city guards.

SPACE: Mutant village and surrounding area.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Arrive at the conflict.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player restarts after conversation with Philon (Autosave).

CUTSCENE

EXT. - MUTANT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Sibelle knocks out a cluster of GUARDS. They fall away revealing: Kaid looming over captured MUTANT VILLAGERS. Some MUTANTS are taking their chances running into the surrounding forest and swamps, disappearing into the haunted black. A few of Kaid's GUARDS chase after them.

Sibelle sees Gibly standing up to Kaid, trembling, but brave. The ground around Gibly is quaking along with him.

SIBELLE (O.S.)
Gibly, run!

Gibly looks at Sibelle, pleading. THUNK! Kaid whacks Gibly upside the head with the butt of his spear. Sibelle runs to Gibly's side, but he is knocked out cold. The air around Sibelle's feet wails, catching licks of the bonfire. She looks up at Kaid with a similar heat.

NOTE: Kaid responds in one of two ways depending on the player's previous actions at the church's steps:

1. If the player egged him on.

Kaid snarls at Sibelle in the midst of his wrath.

KAID
You were right.

Sibelle eyes him suspiciously, fear and anger transparent.

KAID (CONT'D)
I think wounding you will
solve all of my problems.

Kaid lunges at Sibelle, and a battle commences.

2. If the player begged for mercy.

Kaid immediately threatens Sibelle by showing her the tip of his spear.

KAID
I can't afford to give you
the benefit of my doubts.

SIBELLE
I stole a potion; you're
stealing people. You're
terrorizing them!

Sibelle lunges at Kaid, and a battle commences.

STORY BATTLE

Player Objective: Endure the fight/learn [ability breaks].

Enemy: Kaid.

SPACE: Village Bonfire.

Battle End Trigger (1): Sibelle HP=1.

Battle End Trigger (2): Sibelle catches fire to a slum house.

Upon (1): Cutscene 1.

Upon (2): Cutscene 2.

NOTE: Sibelle is not meant to win this fight. Kaid is too strong and fast for her to defeat. The player may fight until her HP is drained down to 1, or she may use the environment.

NOTE: As the fight continues, Sibelle's emotional state decreases in stability. This is manifested by the wind that surrounds her getting stronger, which affects her surroundings. Over time, the player is able to unleash a Cyclone, one of Sibelle's [ability breaks]. If the player is too reckless, the gusts may spread the bonfire to a nearby slum house. This is the alternate ending to the fight.

CUTSCENE

EXT. - MUTANT VILLAGE - NIGHT

1. Sibelle's HP=1

Kaid corners Sibelle in a familiar fashion. She is quivering.

KAID

Where is he?!

Sibelle shakes her head frantically, clutching her wounds.

KAID

Do you think I'm as dumb
as you're pretending to be?

A magical barrier manifests around Sibelle. She looks around, confused and frightened.

GASPAR (O.S.)

She is not involved in
this, Kaid.

Gaspar appears from within the settling dust.

Kaid's anger turns to sheer rage at the sight of Gaspar, who has turned to flee into the woods. Kaid bolts after him, frighteningly fast.

2. Sibelle sets a house on fire.

Kaid corners Sibelle in a familiar fashion. Frozen, she stares past him at the rapidly-growing fire.

KAID

Where is he?!

Sibelle does not react; she continues to pale at the spreading flames. With his other hand, Kaid grabs her by the jaw and lifts her off the ground.

KAID

Where is Gaspar.

A shock of electricity jolts Kaid's hand, forcing him to let go of Sibelle. Kaid, seething, scans in the direction from whence the bolt came.

GASPAR (O.S.)

She is not involved in
this, Kaid.

Kaid's anger turns to sheer rage at the sight of Gaspar, who has turned to flee into the woods. Kaid bolts after him, frighteningly fast.

Sibelle is left injured with shallow breaths and a painful expression.

PLAYER IS GIVEN CONTROL OF SIBELLE

Player Objective: Decide whether to immediately find Sibelle's father or to help the remaining villagers. The player must eventually make her way to Sibelle's home.

Conflict/Obstacle: Environment/city guards/fire.

SPACE: Mutant village and surrounding area.

Failure Trigger: Sibelle HP=0.

Success Trigger: Arrive at Sibelle's home.

Upon Success: Cutscene.

Upon Failure: Player restarts after Kaid chases Gaspar (Autosave).

Sibelle tears through her house straight to her father's bedroom.
Empty.

1. If the player decided to come straight to the house without helping the villagers, she will have arrived in time to see a fleeing yellow bird, tightly grasping the neck of the empty

unknown POTION. Its eyes pierce into Sibelle's, striking her motionless. The bird carries more than just the POTION. Its eyes command an unexpected sentience. A full awareness.

Before Sibelle is able to move again, the bird is gone.

2. If Sibelle arrives too late, she does not see the bird, nor the potion.

Running straight for the bed, Sibelle knows her father is gone, but she strips away the blankets in denial. Her breathing labors as she rips apart his room. Her heart races dangerously fast. Sweating, she clenches her chest and falls to her knees.

Screaming.

This panic attack webs out from her body, chaotically exciting not just the air, but the earth underneath her. The house breathes with Sibelle in her hysteria; every ebb cracking the walls and crumbling the ceiling. The roof collapses over her crumpled body.

Black.

End Inciting Incident.

APPENDIX B (MAJOR BEAT SHEET)

The following are the major story beats for the three main character arcs, in order of play.

SIB

ACT 1

External Struggle

Father is kidnapped

Internal Struggle

All talk, no skill, fickle, cannot forgive others, assumes too much

ACT 2

External Struggle

Exploration/Finding [Asura] in [Varunabad]

Internal Struggle

Fear, insecurity, self-doubt, fronting confidence, naivety

ACT 3

External Struggle

[Asura] loses her mind(s)

Internal Struggle

Taking responsibility for actions and ignorance

ACT 4

External Struggle

Finding her father/Learning that Gaspar is the “bad guy”

Internal Struggle

Balancing the mind/what she has learned

ENDINGS

External Conclusion

Cure or no cure

Internal Conclusion

Confidence, forgiveness and love

or

Insecurity, guilt, bitterness and betrayal

KAID

ACT 1

External Struggle

King's Assassination/Pursuing Gaspar

Internal Struggle

Anger, hopelessness, mimicry, identity-less

ACT 2

External Struggle

Exploration/Finding the Kuleshovs, [Ural] and [Shulgan]

Internal Struggle

Pursuing a purpose and identity

ACT 3

External Struggle

Helping [Ural] defeat/help [Shulgan]

Internal Struggle

Finding empathy and hope

ACT 4

External Struggle

Showdown with Gaspar

Internal Struggle

Controlling anger and destruction

ENDINGS

External Conclusion

Cure or no cure

Internal Conclusion

Proud, focused, external

or

Ashamed, bitter, and alienated

GASPAR

PREQUEL ACT 1

External Struggle

Apprenticeship with Belshazzar

Internal Struggle

A need to impress others, help others, and keep up a reputation

PREQUEL ACT 2

External Struggle

Genetic Massacre

Internal Struggle

Self-doubt/Immense guilt

ACT 1

External Struggle

King's Assassination/Gaspar's Exile/Sister's disease

Internal Struggle

Self-hatred/question of worthiness

ACT 2

External Struggle

Exploration/Find a cure/ Find [Faflon] of the [Etruscans]

Internal Struggle

Rekindling passion and confidence

ACT 3

External Struggle

Must convince the drunken [Faflon] to no longer cage his people.

Internal Struggle

Regaining leadership and a sense of helpfulness

ACT 4

External Struggle

Showdown with Kaid/Create cure

Internal Struggle

Questioning sacrifice for good and glory

ENDINGS

External Conclusion

Cure or no cure

Internal Conclusion

Forgiveness and compensation

or

Eternal self-hatred and debt

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